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SUBJECT: DASD Kahl Meeting with Egyptian Military Officials

CLASSIFIED BY: Donald A. Blome, Minister Counselor, DOS, ECPO;
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) Key Points:

-- On January 31, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East Dr. Colin Kahl met with Major General Mohammad al-Assar, Assistant to the Minister of Defense, Major General Ahmad Moataz, Chief of the American Relations Branch, and Major General Fouad Arafa, Consultant to the Military Intelligence Department.

-- During the meeting, Kahl discussed the need to incorporate a military strategy that included symmetrical and asymmetrical capabilities, pursuing a capabilities-based approach to security assistance, FMF issues, balance of power in the region, nuclear weapons in the Middle East, current U.S. policy towards Iran, Egyptian efforts to counter-smuggling and interdict illicit weapons destined for Gaza, and the release of advanced weapons systems.

-- The Egyptian defense officials continued to stress that the threats facing the United States were different from Egypt's, and Egypt needs to maintain a strong conventional military to counter other armies in the region.

Egypt's Current Security Concerns and National Defense Policy

12. (C) During the 31 January 2010 meeting, al-Assar constantly referred to the numerous unstable security situations in the Middle East that influenced Egyptian military doctrine to include: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon/Hezbollah, Palestine/HAMAS, Yemen, Sudan/Darfur, Somalia, Eritrea, Piracy issues, Algeria, and al-Qaida. Al-Assar emphasized that ethnic conflict throughout the region and border issues could have a negative impact on Egyptian sovereignty at any time. al-Assar commented that he did not expect any of these security situations to resolve in the near future; instead, he believed the list would grow even larger.

13. (C) al-Assar outlined Egypt's National Defense Policy which he stated was based on a defensive, capabilities-based strategy instead of threat-based. The number one priority is the defense of Egyptian land and the Suez Canal. Other goals include: preparedness for unexpected threats such as terrorism; the achievement of regional stability; interoperability with Egypt's military partners; and a leading role for Egypt in the region. Al-Assar provided the Egyptian military's list of regional threats/concerns such as Nile Basin water rights and the conflicts in Darfur and southern Sudan. He commented that one never knows what Libya might do and that it was essential that Egypt maintain the balance of power on its eastern border. He reiterated the fact that Israel possesses unconventional weapons and sophisticated conventional weapons, which creates a regional imbalance and contributes to instability. He noted that stability in the region cannot be attained without balance of power. He stated that the Egyptian military doctrine did not intend to gain an edge on any other country in the region or cause offense to anyone.

14. (C) Al-Assar complained that the Egyptian military sometimes felt pressured by the United States to reform its doctrine and capabilities to counter asymmetric threats. He emphasized that the threats faced by the United States were different from Egypt's. He commented that tanks and aircraft were necessary to fight asymmetrical threats as well. He referred to General Patreaus' Sadr City battle plan against extremists and noted that this plan depended on the use of tanks and aircraft in Iraq. He called on Dr. Kahl to educate Congress about Egypt's military needs and not put limits on the numbers of aircraft and tanks. He noted that the Egyptian military preferred to purchase

its weapons and armaments from the United States, but that Egypt's national security was a red line and they could go elsewhere if they had to.

Security Assistance and Modernization

15. (C) Dr. Kahl commented that the U.S. military had learned some hard lessons about the promises and limits of technology during the first years of the war in Iraq. Kahl stated that there are no longer any purely conventional military conflicts in the world and the last large conventional war was the First Gulf War. The current challenge for modern armies is to find the right balance between conventional and irregular forces and doctrines to fight what Secretary Gates refers to as "hybrid wars." Kahl commented that the U.S. lost more tanks in Iraq to roadside bombs than in battles with Iraqi tanks. He also noted that information technology in the modern war was just as valuable as military equipment in order to have the ability to rapidly communicate and assess the environment.

16. (C) Dr. Kahl reiterated that a modern military should rely on quality equipment rather than a large quantity of outdated armaments, and should place a greater emphasis on the scope of its aggregate capabilities vice number of high-end weapons platforms.

17. (C) Major General Fouad Arafa interjected during the discussion to note that the spirit of the Camp David accord was that there would be a 2:3 balance between Egypt and Israel's security assistance. Egypt's role was to keep a certain balance of power in the region that would not allow other parties to go to war. Egypt had fulfilled this role faithfully for the last 30 years. al-Assar added that the current ratio of 2:5 was a violation of the Camp David ratio.

Yemen, Iran, and the Weapons Free Zone

¶18. (C) al-Assar noted that Iran effectively interfered in the internal affairs of Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq. He commented that Iran's nuclear ambitions would significantly change the balance of power in the region and was contributing to further regional instability and intensifying the conflicts. Al-Assar stated that Egypt views Iran as a threat to the region and its conventional and unconventional weapons would only increase the instability in the region. Al-Assar commented that if Iran was successful in obtaining nuclear weapons, it would only encourage other countries in the Middle East to pursue the same path.

¶19. (C) Al-Assar brought up President Obama's pledge to pursue a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East. He called on the United States to not ignore the Israeli nuclear program. He stated that Israel's nuclear program only gave Iran justification for creating its own nuclear weapons. If Iran obtained nuclear weapons, it would only embolden Iran to use Hezbollah and HAMAS with impunity.

¶10. (C) Dr. Kahl stated that ultimate goal for the United States was the creation of a NWFZ in the Middle East. However, it was not possible to draw strict parallels between Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons and other Middle Eastern countries. Iran is the

only country in the world that was currently threatening to wipe an entire country off the map, and Tehran reinforced this message through destabilizing activities pursued by its proxies in the region. The goal of a NWFZ in the Middle East could take 10-20 years to achieve; however, the international community could not wait 20 years to address Iran's nuclear program and needed to figure out ways to slow down the clock on the Iran's nuclear ambitions.

¶11. (C) Major General Fouad Arafa joined the conversation stating that Iran was using the various Middle East conflicts for its own ambitions and was gaining power because of its interference in the internal affairs of the Middle Eastern countries. It was essential to cut Iran's connections and influence in the regional conflicts in Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine in order to decrease the level of influence Iran enjoyed in the region. Iran was effectively using Arab public opinion to advance its goals. Dr. Kahl agreed and reinforced the need for continued Arab engagement on this issue to ensure a "unified front" on the part of the international community.

¶12. (C) Kahl stated that the United States had reached out to Iran in 2009 through unconditional talks and that this was meant as a test of Iran's willingness to prove that its nuclear program was for peaceful civilian use. Iran, however, had not seized this opportunity to resolve international concerns. Kahl speculated that European countries and even Russia, which would not have supported the sanctions in the past, were now ready to increase pressure on Iran.

Counter-smuggling

¶13. (C) Dr. Kahl extended his appreciation for Egypt's enhanced counter-smuggling efforts in the past year, but expressed concern over recent increases in smuggling activity into the Gaza strip and HAMAS' efforts to rearm. Dr. Kahl emphasized that the United States understands that this is an especially sensitive political issue internally in Egypt, as well as in the region. Dr. Kahl noted that the United States was looking forward to the positive completion of the BTADs project and thanked the Egyptian Military for its agreement-in-principle to sign a follow-on statement for future BTADs support as this provided an opportunity for further cooperation on counter-smuggling and border security. He also underscored the importance of targeting smuggling networks and their financiers in Sudan and the Sinai-not just their activities.

¶14. (C) Dr. Kahl renewed Secretary of Defense Gate's offer to assist the Egyptian military in expanding its counter-smuggling efforts on the Sudanese border and the Red Sea region.

¶15. (C) Al-Assar stated that the smuggling tunnels threatened the national security of Egypt (highlighting HAMAS specifically) and that "terror" could come to Egypt via these tunnels. Egypt has spent approximately \$40 million to purchase the steel for the underground wall on the Gaza border, and Egypt was paying the cost of this wall in terms of public opinion both within Egypt and the region. He noted that once the wall was in place, the time would come to pressure Israel to take responsibility for the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Dr. Kahl reaffirmed that in all of engagements with Israel, the U.S. officials strongly encourage Israel to open crossings into Gaza to allow humanitarian goods to cross, and that Egypt's focus must be affixed on thwarting the movement of illicit weapons into the strip.

Homework

¶16. (C) Dr. Kahl encouraged Egypt to sign a Communications Electronics Security Agreement (CESA aka CISMOA) with the United States, which would pave the way for the transfer of advanced technology to Egypt and greatly increase interoperability. Al-Assar stated that Egypt had "its reasons to delay a decision on a CISMOA." He noted that thousands of Egyptian military officers have participated in training and education programs in the United States and learned about U.S. technology and strategy. He commented that the younger officers are frustrated with the delay in obtaining political release for more advanced U.S. technology. Specifically, al-Assar referred to TOW2B and JAVELIN, which he commented had already been released to other countries. Al-Assar noted that a CISMOA was not a condition for obtaining these systems, but instead they were held up due to a "third party".

¶17. (C) Al-Assar commented that Egypt was in negotiations with Iraq to supply the Iraqi military with approximately 140 tanks, which are manufactured at the FMF tank facility. He noted that the Egyptian Ministry of Defense was awaiting the United States positive response to its request for approval of the transfer. Dr. Kahl noted that the U.S. was considering this request and would provide a response soon.

¶18. (C) Al-Assar encouraged Dr. Kahl to convince the U.S. Congress that Egypt was worth more than \$1.3 billion a year. Dr. Kahl mentioned that Egypt receives the second largest amount of assistance in the world, and that during these difficult financial times in the United States, it was unlikely that annual flow of FMF would increase. He did however reassure the Egyptian officials that the USG would continue to advocate for current levels of FMF and push back on any attempts to condition those funds.
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